

2:Scott G-5 (1870's-1909)1910 AP1 Burma
Burmese AP4

When anything surprises or pleases a Burman he never fails to cry out, Amd—mother. Following the national example, to whom can I better dedicate this book than to you, my dear Mother? Who else will be so eager to praise; so tender to chide; so soft to soothe and console; so prompt to shield and defend? To you, therefore, I dedicate it; and if this tribute of reverence and gratitude gives you a day's pleasure, it will have been a haung-hmu—a work of merit.

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O that curve in the round arm !
It has wrought men grievous harm.
Like the sylphs when they're at play,
Like the maids of Mandalay,
Without display
In everyday
Quiet dresses they
Are busked and gay
As the daughters of the palace, as the maidens of the skies
In their natural, their usual array.

O! could I but sing what I think,
My heart would no more on the brink
Of despairing love struggle and sink,
Ye maidens to heavens the link ;
Each passer-by
Who casts his eye
Upon the buxom Hanthawaddy girls,
Though he be sage,
His feelings wage
Fierce war within his brain-pan till it whirls.

Dewa daughters, fair, fair,
Rosebud fairies, ware, ware,
Born men's hearts to snare, snare,
Can I paint your ways,
Better sound your praise,
In verse
That's terse
Than thus : You're fair as any maid in Mandalay.

Barani is a daughter of nats, corresponding very much
to the classical Flora.

Madi, the spouse of Prince Wethandaya, is always
regarded as the model wife.

Amè! "mother!" is the invariable exclamation of all
Burmans on all possible occasions of astonishment, anger,
doubt, or delight.

The name Hanthawaddy, properly applied to the whole
province, is, in songs, usually employed to designate Rangoon,
for rhythmical more than any other reason, just as Mamye,
or Mye, or Man stands for Mandalay.

"Rosebud fairies," called bōngyo, are daughters of nats,
who having stayed in the country of the déwas for a thousand
years, are obliged to come down to the seat of man again.

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and to lay their last rupee or not on their champions according as their judgment or loyalty bids them. Not a man of them will back the enemy's boat. If they have not supreme confidence in the superiority of their representatives, they simply refrain from staking all they possess. But in all the vast crowd there is not a man who has not a money interest of some kind in the race. There is U Ôn, the district magistrate, in the "grand stand"—a primitive erection run up in half an hour with some sticks and bamboo matting; he is a Thônkwa man by birth himself, but nothing will persuade him to back the fishing village against the subdivision over which he now rules. Why, he has practically built and furnished all the money for the Daungsatpyan himself. The water-craft which he learnt in his native place has only prompted him to hang with greater loving care over the lines of the boat when it was building, and Ba Tu, his eldest son, wields the steering paddle in the Peacock, the pride of Myanaung. Now the old gentleman—he pulled a good oar himself twenty years ago for the very town he now longs to beat—moves about uneasily, gets up and sits down, winds and unwinds his white pawlôn, and can hardly refrain from shouting out, for the Peacock is just passing, and Ba Tu gives a yell and flourishes his paddle, and there is a great shout of "Yauk-kya!" from the Myanaung partisans. Yauk-kya, or yauk-kya ba-tha, means simply "man" or "man, the son of his father," but it is a defiant challenge, or an inspiriting cheer to the Burmese. They are a fine, strong-looking lot, the Myanaung crew, perhaps a little too fleshy, and therefore possibly deficient in staying power, but all young, and worked up to a state of nearly frantic enthusiasm by the presence of their sweethearts and the momentous duty that rests upon them. Their weather-beaten old trainer paddles alongside of them in a little canoe, and begs them to be calm at the beginning and not rush themselves out at the start. The boat is a beauty, and does credit to the old magistrate in the sweeping curves of its lines. Low and as light as skilled hands can make it, it draws only a few inches of water, and does not rise much more than a foot above the surface. So thin are the sides that the boat is tourniquetted together with twisted wire

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THE RISE OF A COURT DRAMA IN BURMA

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be a perfect art; probably they thought the Burmese, as far as dramatic representation was concerned, to be barbarians. Moreover, many of the Burmese scholars themselves were against any substantial changes in the presentation of the play at their court. They were for borrowings from, and imitations of, the Siamese play, but they held that the model must be kept unchanged and intact. Their scholastic mind was such. The slightest distortion of the model called forth protests. When the Siamese play, *Aindarwuntha*, was translated as *Eenaung*, there was bitter criticism. The hero of the play had two names; the official title *Aindarwuntha* given by the king of the gods, and the palace name of *Eenaung*. The Siamese called their play *Aindarwuntha*, but the Burmese translator called it *Eenaung*, for that name was easier to say. The play was known as *Eenao* (only a slightly different pronunciation of the same name) in Cambodia. All the same, there were protests against the Minister Myawaddi's calling his translation *Eenaungzat*. Therefore, the scenes (of the *Rama* play) were presented in the same sequence as in the original, the characters were the same, and the story remained the same. However, changes were introduced in the actual words of the songs and speeches. Such changes were considered legitimate because such slight modifications were allowed even at the Siamese court, thereby keeping the play fresh. References to the topic of the day at the court, to Burmese ideals and ideas, to the wit of an actor; they naturally caused slight variations. Withal, the tradition of rigid faithfulness to the original remained. The gesture, rather than actual acting and facial expression, was of great importance in the Siamese play, and that the Burmese court rigidly followed. Gesture was of great importance in the Sanskrit drama, and elaborate treatises were written on the various gestures and their meaning. The code of the gesture in the Sanskrit drama was as rigid as it was elaborate. In the Siamese play, it was very much less elaborate, but still very rigid. For example, when Rama left the court of the Malay king, all the courtiers had to pay homage in an elaborate and very formal way. It is difficult to ascertain the reason of the importance of the gesture in the play; the Sanskrit drama may have influenced it; or the Siamese court wished to show to the common people the manners and customs of their king's palace; or maybe where the stage-lighting was extremely bad, facial expression could not be seen, and therefore gesture alone could convey the meaning to the audience, of course, apart from the actual dialogue. However, the importance of the

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536* gesture passed on to the Burmese reproduction of the play. The rigid
201 tradition soon called forth protests, if not in actual words, then in
deeds. If the *Rama* play could not be changed to meet Burmese
tastes, other plays would have to be invented. As a result, a native
court drama came into being.¹

4. THE BURMESE COURT DRAMA

536* It was during the reign of Hsinbyushin under whom the victories
175 against the Siamese and the Chinese had been won, that the *Rama*
644 play was first presented at court. He was succeeded by Singu, who
538 was king from 1776 to 1782. Singu could appreciate and compose
good poetry when sober, but such occasions were rare. All the same,
the learned atmosphere of the court was maintained, for his queen,
the daughter of the famous commander-in-chief who defeated the
Siamese and the Chinese invaders, was an accomplished poet herself,
and she ever encouraged the continued presentation of the Siamese
Rama at court. Singu was followed by Bodawpaya (1782-1811),
who was one of the strongest despots that ever sat on the Burmese
throne. But his despotism was of the enlightened kind, and
under his patronage, the learned atmosphere of the court remained
unimpaired. The earlier half of his reign saw the rise of a Burmese
court drama.

[195] Some time about the year 1783, a young courtier came to the
forefront of scholastic circles at the court. This young man, who
was a typical product of the age of learning, which was also the age of
triumph, had distinguished himself in various campaigns when he
began his literary career by composing songs modelled on those of
the Siamese *Rama*. He was essentially a scholar, learning and experi-
menting, and he was an accomplished student of literature, both
Burmese and foreign. But in spite of his great learning, he kept his
own writings free from too rich an imagery and too bombastic a
language; his Burmese was simple and pure. He wrote in the language
of the court but without artificiality, so that his songs were not only
admired at court, but understood and sung by the common people.
After making his name as a song-writer, he produced various literary
works of all kinds and thus enhanced his reputation, until he reached
the zenith of his literary career in about the year 1785, when he com-
posed and produced the first Burmese court play. This young

¹ Extracts from the *Ramayana*, *The Statue Play* attributed to Bhasa, and
the Siamese-Burmese *Rama* play are given in appendix i.